

15 – Tetzaveh & Purim – Outline

Intro

- in our study so far, we have been emphasizing the maturing of the bride
 - more independent, free-thinking than the young girl rescued from Egypt in the spring
 - God has to hide in order for us to have more free will
 - Chanukkah and Purim have been added by the bride to the calendar from her own free will

Tetzaveh Summary

The Truth-Prayer Sandwich

- the instructions for the priests (clothing and consecration) are sandwiched between the command regarding oil for the menorah and the description of the golden altar of incense
 - the menorah and golden altar and the menorah are linked: “And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning WHEN HE DRESSES THE LAMPS he shall burn it, and when Aaron SETS UP THE LAMPS AT TWILIGHT, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations” (Exodus 30:7-8)
 - idea: light of the menorah = Torah study, and incense = prayer, and these two go hand-in-hand, especially in the morning and evening
 - these two are also the primary *actions* with which the priests clothe themselves, so these two sandwich the description of the priestly clothing

We are a Priesthood

- Q: What does these details about the priesthood have to do with us? A: We are a royal priesthood.
 - this idea begins at Sinai: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6)
 - God is speaking to a mixed multitude, both the Jews and the Gentiles being grafted into them
 - we inherit this promise, both the Jews today and the Gentiles grafted into them today
 - though only the descendants of Aaron are given a role in the earthly Tabernacle/Temple
 - the Priesthood of Believers is supported in the Apostolic Scriptures

- “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9)
- “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come...To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever” (Revelation 1:4-6)
- Hebrews describes Yeshua as our High Priest in the heavenly Tabernacle, and if we are in Him and He is in us, then we Gentiles may assume that we, too, are of the Melchizedekian order of the priesthood
- What are we, a royal priesthood, to learn from this Torah portion?
 - clothing conceals but also reveals – revealing both the shape underneath and, deeper, revealing something of the person’s personality
 - the priestly garments are made for “glory and beauty,” and this is an outer reflection of an inner glory and beauty
 - and our clothing needs to reflect these inner qualities
 - modest, tidy, and even reflecting a kind of royal nobility
 - especially on the Sabbath, when we should wear better clothes
 - learning from who God chose to be the first High Priest
 - we can “put on” the character of the priesthood, too, because in the end, we can’t take our physical clothing with us, but we do take our good deeds
 - What can we learn from Aaron?
 - he was humble enough to accept his role as the perennial “second fiddle” to his younger brother, Moses
 - he was able to submit to spiritual authority, even if that authority was his own little brother
 - he not only doesn’t try to usurp power, but he is a constant help to Moses
 - because of this humility and lack of competitiveness and ability to accept the portion God had for him, God allows him to move to the “first chair” in this area, the priesthood
 - Moses is not made the High Priest; Aaron is
 - Aaron is described in Jewish tradition as a beloved peacemaker
 - Yeshua says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9)

Purim

- a connection between Tetzaveh and Purim is the idea of clothing, which the sages point out is mentioned several times in the book of Esther
 - clothing is a good metaphor for the whole holiday
 - the essence of Purim: the hiddenness that reveals
- placing Purim in the calendar

- when free will is highest, God is most hidden
 - His name is only found in hidden ways in Esther
 - the book lacks any explicit miracles
 - the book lacks Divine revelation
 - it's a story where chance seems to play a big role
 - "Purim" means "lots" – "chance"
- late winter is a time of testing, a darkness, God's hiddenness
 - so that God can bring a light out of us from the darkness
 - coming to a place of revealing our true inner nature, the spark of God within us
 - God is challenging us in this testing to look at every situation and say, "I don't believe in luck. I don't believe in coincidence. It's all Him. Lord help me to walk through this as a faithful bride."
 - Israel passed the test at Purim, and a great light shone out from them
 - R'Tatz: You need darkness in order to see the light. Zohar: You can only bring light out of darkness."
 - shining of our light is an aspect of maturity
 - might be direct evangelism
 - might be indirect
 - God squeezes us, and are watching what happens
 - R'Trugman: when you press physicality, like olives, what comes out is spirituality, like the oil we burn to make light
 - Purim is one of the most evangelistic moments in Israel's history: "The Jews had LIGHT and gladness and joy and honor. And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. AND MANY FROM THE PEOPLES OF THE COUNTRY DECLARED THEMSELVES JEWS, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them" (Esther 8:16-17)
 - the "end is enwedged in the beginning"
 - God sees our faithfulness, the light that shines from us in the 12th month, and His response is the new light of Nissan by which we see that facets of us are yet enslaved, and we move a step higher with Him
 - the light from us at Purim provokes the response from God of new light
 - Haman the Agagite, Haman the Amalekite
 - "Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite"
 - one reading: "magnificent son of the double flame" – a bright light

- one of the paradoxes of the story; Haman's "magnificent light" was snuffed out when he was hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordechai
- Agag, King of Amalek
 - Agag is found in 1 Samuel 15 – the haftarah for Tetzaveh
 - Saul spares him and the best cattle of Amalek, and for this he loses the kingship of Israel
 - Samuel "hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord in Gilgal" – no mercy
 - in the same way, no mercy is shown Haman or his 10 sons
- What does Amalek represent?
 - in Exodus 17, the people at Rephidim question, "Is the Lord among us or not?" With this doubting, they summoned Amalek to attack.
 - Amalek is "doubt"
 - same gematria as "sofek," "doubt"
 - in Deu 25, Amalek is connected to "chance" when it says Amalek "happened upon you," "kar'cha ba'derech"
 - "kar'cha" means "coincidence, cold, sensual impurity"
 - we are not to take this bait; Amalek didn't just stumble over Israel in the wilderness by chance; we are to say, "This is God."
 - "doubt" and "chance" are brothers – if we doubt God, we end up bowing down to "chance"
- Faith and doubt are enemies
 - "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mat 14:31)
 - neither is really based in the head, the intellect
 - they both connect to both the heart (emotions) and the head (intellect), but they don't sit squarely in either place
 - faith always requires a "leap of faith" in the end
 - the sages say Amalek, doubt, lives in the neck
 - "Amalek" sounds like "melika," the commandment regarding severing a turtledove at the neck
 - doubt resists intellectual inspection: R'Tatz: when the idea of God comes along the doubter says, "Maybe yes, maybe no. In the end it doesn't matter." – apathy is somewhat beyond the heart, and intellect is short circuited here
- The Face of Amalek Today: Evolution
 - R'Tatz: "Amalek is the space between the world and belief in the Torah."
 - this doubt today is often built upon the theory of evolution, which offers an alternative to a Creator
 - Evolutionists say, "Given enough time, life was *bound* to emerge"
 - the god of "chance"

- Evolution has the veneer of science, but it's a faith-based belief
- The Trick
 - microevolution—sifting of genes already present; proven and undisputed
 - macroevolution—"amoeba-to-man" evolution, requires the creation of billions of new genes
 - unproven, a fiction, no evidence
 - the trick is that biology writers prove microevolution, then just continue on with macroevolution without proving the second; it's assumed
- "That's religion. This is science!"
 - don't accept this assertion
 - belief in macroevolution is a religion that requires more faith than belief in a creator
 - they are not operating primarily in the world of the intellect; those that are will eventually come to believe in the Creator
 - don't spend too much time arguing with them
 - but treat them with grace; their world is not a kind one – survival of the fittest, moral confusion, deep unease
- If doubts arise in you, "Is the Lord with us or not?" don't try to reason with the doubt. Just kill it. Don't dwell on the thought. Press on in faith.
 - in the end, the light will pour out in the darkness, and you will experience joy, the joy of Purim
- Yeshua and hiddenness
 - Yeshua is the ultimate example of the hiddenness that reveals
 - born in humble circumstance, placed in a feeding trough
 - spoke in parables
 - avoided putting Himself forward when possible
 - allowed Himself to be hung on a cross
 - the light that came from that humble and quiet life changed the world forever

Tetzaveh & Purim Transcript (not exact)

Welcome to Beth Tikkun and this series called “Spiritual Seasons.” This week we are in parsha Tetzaveh, Exodus 28 through the first 10 verses of chapter 30, a short portion. We will also discuss the holiday of Purim today.

Our mandate here with this Spiritual Seasons series is to explore the weekly Torah portions in the light of the pattern of growth God has designed for us within the calendar. Each year we travel through a year of development according to a pattern, a year of salvation, and each Torah portion reflects a point in that annual curriculum.

Since beginning our study in the 8th month, our main topic has been how it is that we grow up to be the mature bride in this second half of the year, this second half of the cycle. The mature bride is more independent and free-thinking than the young girl who is rescued from Egypt in the spring. God desires a bride who has the INDEPENDENCE TO GENUINELY CHOOSE HIM. This means that He has to hide a bit during this section of the year when we are reaching maturity because with God’s increasing hiddenness, our free will grows. If He is very obvious to us, if His light is dazzling us, we simply won’t make choices contrary to His will, so our free will is limited when He is obvious. It’s only when He hides Himself that we can really step up to walk in faith.

This idea of God’s hiddenness and our increased free will is seen on this side of the calendar in the two holidays of Chanukkah and Purim. God chose to only give us holidays in the first seven months of the calendar, leaving these 5 cold months without a holiday. So the bride has stepped up to bring forth two special mo’edim out of love for the Groom, Chanukkah and Purim. These are not commanded in the Torah, but they are ways that the bride uses her free will to express her love for God. She steps up to set these special days and pledges to keep them, and through them she says, “I know this isn’t commanded, but I want to bring a special gift to my Creator, my Rescuer, my Groom.”

Tetzaveh Summary

We’ll have more to say about Purim, in particular, in the second half of this teaching, since Purim is coming up for us next Monday night. Let’s turn now, though, to portion Tetzaveh. Tetzaveh begins with the commandment to have the children of Israel bring olive oil for the menorah. The bulk of the portion is taken up with descriptions of the priests’ special clothing followed by the detailed description of how the priests are to be consecrated for service. Finally, the portion ends with the description of the golden altar of incense.

The Truth-Prayer Sandwich

So we have these instructions regarding the priests’ clothing and their consecration sandwiched between the oil for the menorah at the beginning and the altar of incense at the end. These two, the menorah and the golden altar, have a kind of connection to each other in the text. Listen to how the two are connected in Exodus 30 vss 7-8, part of the description of the altar of

incense: “And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning WHEN HE DRESSES THE LAMPS he shall burn it, and when Aaron SETS UP THE LAMPS AT TWILIGHT, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations” (Exodus 30:7-8). In other words, when the menorah is being tended, both in the evening when it is lit and in the morning when it is trimmed, incense is to be burned.

I can't say I can explain this connection, but here's a thought: the menorah represents the light of truth that we principally get from reading God's Word, and the altar of incense represents prayer. Reading God's Word (the light of the menorah) and prayer (the incense) go hand-in-hand, and we do well to engage in both together both in the morning and evening. And further, these activities of Torah study and prayer are central to the role of the priests – we can say that these two activities are the primary good works with which the priests CLOTHE themselves, so these two are referenced before and after the description of the priestly clothing.

We Are a Priesthood

There are many directions we could go in exploring the clothing of the priesthood. The uniform for regular priests consists of 4 pieces of special clothing, and the High Priest's consists of 8. I want to save plenty of time to discuss Purim today, though, so I'll keep the focus at a general level and sprinkle in the application to Yeshua along the way.

As we're reading these details of the priestly garments, we might be thinking, “What does this have to do with me?” This section is about the priesthood! One point I'd like to make today is the idea that all of these details of the Tabernacle and the priests apply to us on some level. In listening to some rabbis this week, more than one mentioned the idea that each of us has a facet of the priesthood within us or even an aspect of Moses, himself, within us. And so there is the sense that if we are all a priesthood, then these details of clothing and consecration DO have an application to us. That's the direction I'd like to go today because it's not just the rabbis saying that we have a spark of Moses in us. The idea of the Priesthood of Believers is supported by the Apostolic Scriptures in multiple ways. The most important of these is the idea that Yeshua is our High Priest in the heavenly Tabernacle and, further, that HE LIVES IN US. If we have *THE* High Priest living in us, then we need to be putting on the clothing of the High Priest.

Before we go further, let's strengthen this idea that we all are to reflect the priesthood. The idea begins when God is proposing to Israel at Mt. Sinai. He says to Israel there, “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6). Keep in mind that God is speaking to a mixed multitude gathered around Mt. Sinai, both Jews and the Gentiles who are being grafted into them. Our generations are the heirs to this promise of priesthood, priesthood for both the Jew and the Gentiles grafted into Israel. We who are Gentiles need to keep in mind, however, that though Israel is a nation of priests, God ordained that only the descendants of Aaron are to perform the priestly functions at the Temple. This is not something available to the rest of the nation or those grafted in.

To reinforce the idea of the priesthood of Believers, let me read a couple of passages from the Apostolic Scriptures, both of which are addressed to the churches of Asia, which were mixed Jew and Gentile.

1 Peter 2 says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Revelation chapter 1 says, “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come...To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever” (Revelation 1:4-6).

The writer of Hebrews further states that Yeshua is a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. If we are in Him and He in us, then we who are Gentiles may assume that we, too, are of the Melchizedekian order of the priesthood. Again, this does not mean that we claim the ability to do anything at a future earthly Temple. Yeshua ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle.

Ok, so, if we are called a royal priesthood, what are we learning here in this Torah portion that we can apply to ourselves? Let’s talk about clothing for a minute. Grant has often explained that clothing both conceals and reveals. It covers us up, so it conceals. But at the same time, it is made to fit our bodies underneath. It’s a second skin. So it also reveals what’s underneath. But it’s a second skin that reveals more than our shape; it also reveals something of the personality that is even deeper inside. We are blessed enough to live in a time when clothing is cheap and plentiful. We get to choose our clothes from thousands of choices, and our choices reveal something of our personality, our inner self. Clothing both hides and reveals.

We read in this portion that the priestly garments are made for “glory and beauty.” What does that mean we’re like on the inside, we who are members of a royal priesthood? If the outside is revealing the inside, then there is a kind of glory and beauty inside us that is reflected in the priestly clothing and our own choices of clothing. Our clothing needs to reflect the pure, holy, beautiful spirit within us. It should be modest and tidy and even, to an extent, reflective of a kind of nobility, a royalty. Let me say to the younger people, I know it’s popular to look a bit disheveled these days, but can I suggest that you should always be asking yourself if your clothing is reflecting your royalty and priesthood? If you’re mowing the lawn, fine, dress for that. But respect yourself enough to generally present yourself with an outward dignity that reflects your inner dignity. The priests’ clothing reflects an inner glory and beauty.

And this applies especially to what we wear on the Sabbath. It is a Jewish tradition to wear better clothes on Shabbat to help sanctify the day. We used to have this awareness in America more than we do now – dressing in your Sunday best. As I was growing up, I saw the church go through a clothing transition that I think was partly designed to help welcome in those who were unchurched. The motives may have been good, but we lost something precious when we began going to church in regular everyday clothes.

So, this is one practical application to the Torah portion. I want to make one further connection here. If we are taking lessons about being priests from the Bible and this portion, then we need to look at who God is choosing for these duties and learn from their examples. We need to draw from the character of God's appointed priests because in the end, our ACTIONS in this life are our most important clothing, part of the covering we will carry with us into the next world. In this portion, God is specifically choosing Aaron to be the priestly family. What can we see in Aaron that we should strive to emulate, to clothe ourselves with?

What most strikes me about Aaron is that he humbly accepts the spiritual authority of his YOUNGER brother. He did not question the fact that though he was the older brother, Moses was God's choice to deliver and lead the people, not him. Though we see Aaron question Moses at one point in one specific matter, we don't see Aaron ever trying to take any of Moses' authority, even though God had put Aaron very near to Moses and the leadership of Israel. It was Aaron who started the first three plagues in Egypt. It was Aaron who was gifted with speech while Moses was not. In some ways, Aaron may have looked like the better leader. But Aaron not only doesn't question God's choice, he is humble enough to be a constant helper to his younger brother. He serves Moses. He often speaks for Moses. He leads in Moses' absence, though he stumbles in that. At one point, at the battle of Amalek, Aaron faithfully lifts Moses' arms, along with Hur. He is there to serve his younger brother, and he is faithful. He's always playing second fiddle to Moses, and he's okay with that because he recognizes that God made him a second fiddler. Aaron knows how to submit to spiritual authority. There is a humility there, and a simple acceptance of God's will for him, and the deep belief that what God has given to him personally is enough. I think this ability of Aaron to accept Moses as his leader and to be a constant support to him opened the door for God to, in one important area, take Aaron from the second chair and put him in the first chair – the priesthood. MOSES is not made High Priest. AARON is given this great honor.

We do well to not be comparing ourselves to others and to be happy for others who have gifts that we don't. We do well to accept the spiritual authority God has given us. We do well to trust that what God gave us is what is perfect for us in this moment. We should try to put on THESE important aspects of Aaron's clothing. This is the clothing that lasts.

Aaron is known in Jewish tradition as a peacemaker. All of Israel mourned for him when he died. This is not said of Moses, the prophet. The role of the prophet is to bring the word of the Lord to the people, not to make friends. Aaron, on the other hand, was gifted with diplomacy, and that's a special skill. And the people loved him. Yeshua says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). We should also strive to bring peace between people around us. In doing that, we are emulating Aaron, the one God chose to be the first earthly High Priest and the father of the priestly line.

Purim

Let's turn now to the holiday of Purim. For the sake of time, I'm going to assume that you are all familiar with the story of Esther. If not, you can give it a read now. It's not very long. These comments will make much more sense if you are familiar with the story.

There are actually some strong connections between parsha Tetzaveh and the holiday of Purim, and Purim often falls out during this portion. One of those connections is the idea of clothing. Many rabbis point out that clothing is mentioned many times in the Purim story. I think that's because clothing is a great metaphor for the holiday in general. As we mentioned earlier, clothing both hides and reveals. It's kind of paradoxical in that way. And the essence of Purim is the hiddenness that reveals. Let me say that again, the essence of Purim is the hiddenness that reveals.

Let's do a little work now to place Purim in the flow of the calendar. Remember that we are in a time of the year when mankind's free will is coming to its highest point, and this is related to God's hiddenness. As we have said, the more hidden God is, the more free will we have. According to the sages, because Israel had so much free will at the time of Purim, but they had little free will when God was so obvious at Mt. Sinai, it is AT PURIM that they truly made the decision to be covenanted to Him. Purim was their greatest moment to be faithful when God was hidden and not a blazing fire on the mountain or leading them through the wilderness.

We see God's hiddenness in the Purim story in a number of ways. The mask is a symbol of Purim partly for this reason. We know that God's name does not appear in the megillah of Esther, though Grant has shown us several times how God's name is, in fact, hidden in the text in a few places. Not only is God's name not openly written in Esther, but the book also lacks any explicit miracles or any Divine revelation. On the surface, it's just a story of a girl raised by her cousin who becomes queen and helps to save her people. It's a story where chance seems to play a big role, and this is alluded to in the name "Purim," which means "lots." In the story, Haman casts lots, pur, as he crafts his scheme. Some say he cast lots to find the most auspicious day to carry out his plan against the Jews, the "luckiest" day.

Late winter is a time of testing so that, through our dogged faithfulness, God can bring a great light out of us, and that light is our true selves. We are coming to a place of revealing our true inner nature, that spark of God within us. Through the darkness of God's hiddenness and the testing He brings, WE are revealed. Purim is the hiddenness that reveals. The testing at this time that God brings about may take the form that it does here in the Purim story, the idea that by chance, by coincidence, we have suffered a great setback. Hear this: God is challenging us to look at EVERY situation He designs for us, especially situations that look like they simply developed by chance, bad luck, and say, "I don't believe in luck. I don't believe in coincidence. Nothing happens that is not by God's design for good reasons." God wants us to look at that dilemma in front of us and say, "God, you can't fool me. I can see You behind this problem. Help me now to walk through this faithfully. I want to be a faithful bride to the end."

Israel passed the test in the great darkness at Purim, and as they did, a great light shone from them. R' Akiva Tatz points out that if you're standing in bright light, you can't see the little light

you're shining. You need darkness in order to see the light. He points out that the Zohar says you can only bring light out of darkness. We say that God is the Creator of darkness. He creates it because darkness is necessary for drawing a light out of us that can be seen. And this great shining of Israel's light in the darkness is another aspect of maturity at this time of the year. One element of maturity is that the light goes out from you. Sometimes this means actual evangelism. Purim was one of the most evangelistic moments in Israel's history. In Esther 8, it says, "The Jews had LIGHT and gladness and joy and honor. And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. AND MANY FROM THE PEOPLES OF THE COUNTRY DECLARED THEMSELVES JEWS, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them" (Esther 8:16-17).

Notice that Israel didn't go door knocking with evangelistic tracts here. I'm not disparaging that practice, by the way. My dad became a Believer partly because someone left a tract on a bus seat, and my dad used to go door-to-door when I was young. There is a time and place for that kind of direct evangelism. What happens in this story, though, is different. God puts Israel in the vice and squeezes. Their physical lives are threatened. R'Trugman says that when you press physicality, like olives in an olive press, what comes out is spirituality. And isn't that the truth. And that spirituality isn't always light, by the way. When I'm squeezed, sometimes my true heart comes out and I don't like what I see. In the case of Purim, though, God had been refining Israel in exile, and what came out of the people was faith in their God and faithfulness to their covenant with Him. This faithfulness is what had been marinating in them. Love of God is what had been filling their hearts and minds, and when they were pressed, the light of faithfulness and love for God is what came out, and it was a great light, indeed.

So, this light shines from God's people in the darkness of chance and the darkness of Haman's plot. And this light is connected to the next month, Nissan. Remember that one of the characteristics of the end of the cycle is that it carries a hint of the beginning of the next cycle with it. The sages say "the end is enwedged in the beginning." It's circular. And in a circle, the end is connected to the beginning. God sees the faithfulness of His bride in the 12th month, and, in a way, He RESPONDS in the next month, the 1st month, the month of Passover, by shining a new light of His own on us, and by that new and greater light, we see that there is more work to be done. There are parts of us that are still enslaved. And we cry out to Him by the illumination of that new light. And a new cycle begins. So it is that the light that shines FROM us at the end helps to bring forth the responding light that shines ON us at the next beginning.

Haman the Agagite, Haman the Amalekite

With the time remaining today, I want to drill down a bit on the enemy in this story and bring out an application for today that R'Tatz emphasizes when he talks about Purim. In the book of Esther, the arch-enemy of the Jews is called "Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite." What can we learn from this name? First of all, one way to read this string of names is "magnificent son of the double flame." In other words, Haman's name alludes to a bright light. In the end, Haman is hung on the gallows he had built for Mordechai. The paradoxes and ironies in the story are all over the place. In the end, Haman's "magnificent" light was snuffed out because he

tried to snuff out the Jews, and it was instead the light of the Jews that shone out like fire throughout the known world at the time.

But I want to focus on another aspect of this name. Haman is an “Agagite.” The only place in Scripture we find the name “Agag” is in 1 Samuel 15, which is the haftarah for this week’s Torah portion, Tetzaveh. It is the story of the downfall of King Saul. King Saul is ordered to attack and utterly wipe out Amalek, destroying all the people and even the livestock. But Saul spares the Amalekite king, King Agag, along with the best of the livestock. And for this, the kingship is removed from Saul. It was very important to God that Amalek be entirely eradicated, even the livestock. The prophet Samuel ends up killing Agag. And the text is emphatic. It says, “And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.” Amalek exists to be warred against and annihilated, which is what happens in Esther. Not only is Haman hung on the gallows he had built for Mordechai, but his ten sons are also killed and eventually hung on that same gallows. Is the Bible just being gruesome for no reason in describing these things? No, if the Bible is being gruesome, it is to make the point that no mercy was shown here. Agag, Haman, and his 10 sons represent something so dangerous in the world that they can be shown no mercy whatsoever. King Saul lost the kingdom for showing a shred of mercy to Amalek.

So what does Amalek represent? We didn’t get the chance to discuss this back in parsha Beshalach, but the topic of Amalek fits well here in connection to Purim. In Exodus 17, Israel has just come out of Egypt. They sing the Song of the Sea, and they march into the deep wilderness. They quickly start to suffer some doubts because their situation looks quite bleak, quite dark. They have no water. God provides water, and there’s light in the darkness. They have no food. God provides quail and manna, and there’s light in the darkness. Once again, though, when they camp at Rephidim, they have no water. And the people ask, “Is the Lord among us or not?” And the very next verse says, “Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.” Israel SUMMONED Amalek’s attack. How so? They doubted whether God was among them or not. Amalek Is Doubt. The sages point out that the gematria of Amalek is the same as the gematria of “sofek,” which means “doubt.” Israel doubted whether God was among them or not, and Amalek attacked.

In Deuteronomy 25, there’s a connection made between Amalek and the idea of chance. Doubt and chance are brothers. When we doubt God and reject God, we find ourselves in a universe run by chance and luck, and we end up bowing down at that altar. How many people don’t show a belief in God but they have a lucky jersey or trust to the death in some superstition! How many don’t believe in God but believe in luck and even believe that they can influence their own luck! The connection in Deuteronomy 25 is this: it says that when Israel was coming out of Egypt, “Amalek happened upon you...” and “didn’t fear the Lord.” The phrase “happened upon you” is “kar’cha ba’derech.” We’re told that the word translated “happened upon you,” “kar’cha,” means “coincidence.” It also means “cold” and “sensual impurity,” (Tatz: “Purim and Sin of Adam,” 26m), and these are all related meanings. But the idea is that Amalek just happened to stumble upon Israel in the wilderness and decided to attack. That’s one way to read Moses’ sentence there.

But we are not to take that bait. We are not to believe that Amalek just happened upon Israel. God often puts on the clothing of “chance,” and “luck.” One way God hides Himself is under the cloak of chance, like in the Purim story. In the wilderness, God allowed Amalek to trip over Israel at just the moment Israel doubted Him. That’s not a coincidence, but it could look that way. Believers say “No. It’s all God.”

It might not seem illogical to the world to decide that God is in control even when it seems that our luck is very bad. But the world doesn’t understand the life of faith. Faith is founded on logic and evidence, BUT IT GOES BEYOND LOGIC AND EVIDENCE. Faith TRANSCENDS logic. We follow God on a path that often looks illogical to the world. We look at our circumstances in a way that often seems crazy to the world.

Faith and doubt are enemies, at odds with each other. Peter has faith to walk on the water, but then he starts to sink, and Yeshua says, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Mat 14:31). The interesting thing about both faith and doubt is that neither is really based in the head, in the intellect, in the understanding and logic. They both have connections to evidence and logic. But in the end, evidence and logic can only take you so far. With faith, eventually there’s always that “leap of faith” because we can’t see God tangibly, at least not right now. We can’t see the beginning of creation. We can’t see what’s going to happen in the future if we persist in obedience when the situation looks grim.

Doubt, too, is not an especially intellectual animal. The sages say Amalek lives in the neck. “Amalek” sounds the commandment to sever the neck of the turtledove, which is called “melika.” The neck is below the head, the seat of the intellect. And the neck is above the heart, the seat of the emotions. What the sages are saying is that while doubt is influenced by both our intellect and our emotions it’s not entirely controlled by either. It’s rather illusive. In the words of R’Tatz, when the question of God comes up, doubt says, “Maybe yes, maybe no. In the end it doesn’t matter.” There’s a kind of coldness there, an emotional numbness, an apathy. And there’s a resistance to real intellectual inspection there, too. The mind wants to think about the idea of God, but along comes doubt and sort of derails everything, putting an end to the thought process: “Maybe yes, maybe no. In the end, it doesn’t matter.” And you move on to the next thing in your day, and your doubt goes unexamined, and the belief crisis is averted once again. It’s really an insidious enemy, and it must be crushed absolutely. It’s poison.

The Face of Amalek Today: Evolution

Let’s finish with one important way that we can apply Amalek to our society today, an application that R’Tatz frequently mentions. R’Tatz is a surgeon as well as a rabbi, so he has spent a lot of time in the realm of science and scientists. And it weighs heavily on his heart that our world is so duped by the false religion of the evolutionists. R’Tatz says that Amalek is the space between the world and belief in the Torah. And that doubt, that space that separates from belief in the Torah, is often built upon the theory of evolution, which is offered as the alternative to a Creator. In the end, the evolutionists have put their faith in the god of chance. They say, “Given enough time, an infinity of monkeys pounding away at an infinity of typewriters will eventually randomly produce the works of Shakespeare.” Oh really? In other

words, given enough time and enough chances, life is bound to emerge. This is the god of chance put in place of the real God. Doubting God is possible here because an alternative is offered, and that alternative is called “chance.” “Oh, it was bound to happen some day!” This is not science, though it has the veneer of science. In reality, the theory of evolution is a belief that has become the foundation of a humanist religion and a humanist morality that allow people to be their own gods and live as they want.

I want to go into some detail here because evolution is as alive in our society as it has ever been, and it’s corrosive. And we need to be equipped to address it, especially if we have children. Let me say it again, in our day, doubting God often rests on the foundation of evolution. It’s one of the greatest lies ever perpetrated upon humanity. On the one hand, we don’t want to take up too much mental real estate on this foolishness, but on the other hand, we need to be informed, and we need to know how to read many of the science headlines and such. The idea is just everywhere. We don’t avoid learning about evolution because we need to understand it in order to refute it.

Let me just mention, by the way, that I do have a degree in Biology. By now I have forgotten much of what I learned back when I was in college, but when I was studying for that degree, I was quite interested in this topic, so I did some extra studying about it at that time.

We need to be clear what we mean by the word “evolution” because the writers of the biology textbooks use this word in a very tricky way to indoctrinate students into secular humanism. The word “evolution” can refer to two very different ideas, and their trick is to blur the lines between the two. These two ideas are called “microevolution” and “macroevolution.” There’s one main difference between them. Microevolution is simply the sifting of genes that are already present, the limiting of genes to get a desired look or ability. We start with a wolf, and if we get rid of all the genes for large size, we can end up with a small wolf, and we’re on the way to making dogs. Based on how we continue sifting the genes, we can get a great diversity of dogs. The key question is always, “Have any new genes been created?” In this case, the answer is “no,” so this is microevolution. Microevolution is just limiting the choices for what the descendants can look like. No one questions that microevolution is a real process.

Macroevolution is different. It’s sometimes called “amoeba-to-man” evolution, and the key to macroevolution is that it requires the development over time of millions upon millions upon millions of new genes. There’s no good evidence for macroevolution. In place of real support for this idea, they hire artists to imagine what this slow change would look like over time, and they put these imaginative illustrations in the textbooks as if there actually is evidence behind them. But it’s all a fiction.

Here’s the trick that the textbooks do. They first convincingly prove microevolution with pictures of a wolf branching into all kinds of dogs. And based on that proving of microevolution, they just go right into the illustrations of amoeba-to-man evolution with almost no attempt to prove it. They trot out microevolution and say, “Evolution has been absolutely proven scientifically.” And microevolution certainly has been proven. Of course you can filter the gene

pool and get a different-looking result. Mankind has been doing that since the beginning. But based on that discussion, the textbook writers just assume that macroevolution is also proven. But macroevolution requires the creation of billions of new genes. And the problem for modern scientists is that they simply can't explain with any kind of plausibility what guided the creation of the new genes. So the secular educators are very savvy, indeed. And we need to be aware of their tactics, because evolution is the root of Amalek in our world today. We need to know how to cut him down.

When someone who believes in macroevolution is talking with me about origins and they try to throw in my face, "THAT'S religion. THIS is science," I politely point out to them that not only is their belief in macroevolution a FAITH-BASED RELIGION, but the evidence supporting that faith is much weaker than the evidence supporting my faith in God. Don't let them get away with labeling their belief as "science" and yours as "faith." It takes a greater faith to believe that all of this just happened randomly, like an infinity of monkeys smashing typewriter keys.

Believers in macroevolution are not operating primarily in the world of the intellect. They are operating in the world of Amalek, and Amalek resists deep intellectual examination. If there are a few evolutionists who are being more intellectually honest, they will eventually come to a belief in a Creator. The others will continue to plod along in spiritual darkness.

But again, as ridiculous as it is, and as DAMAGING as it is to our society in that it offers a widely accepted alternative to a Creator, we must extend some grace to these who are so lost in that pitiful darkness. It's not a kind world that they live in. It's a world where only the most fit survive. It's a world of confused morality and a deep struggle to find meaning in life. But for the grace of God, we would be right down there in that pit with them. Approach them with love, knowing that deep within their souls, in a place they are too afraid to explore, they sense the lie. And because they sense the lie, there is a lurking unease that haunts them in their quiet moments. They are not at rest. And when we are not at rest, we are constantly exhausted. Let your heart go out to them even as you refuse to accept their worldview.

And we don't waste too much time in these conversations. In tying this up today, one point I'd like to emphasize is that you can only go so far in fighting doubt with logical arguments. If you find doubt cropping up within you, don't reason with it. Instead, you do what God says to do with Amalek: you simply annihilate it. You allow it no quarter. You give it no place whatsoever. If doubt crops up, you don't try to think through it. You just kill it.

That's not to say that we don't have a great many logical reasons to believe in God. We do. Our faith is evidence-based. What I'm saying is that when you're walking with God and the way seems to grow dark, and the enemies of truth seem to be prospering, and one evil decree after the next seems to be falling against you, and the thought comes into your mind, "Is God with us or not?" do not allow that thought to live. You have the choice to dwell on the thought or not. Kill it. Press on in faith, knowing that God is in the process of bringing light out of darkness. Just keep walking. Purim is about seeing through chance, seeing through the cloud, seeing through the extra clothing that God is putting on as He maybe brings some trial into our lives. In the

end, we will witness the flipping of Purim when He draws the light out of the darkness. Squeeze the physical, and what comes pouring out, eventually, is the spiritual. And when that light emerges, the result is joy. We experience joy, the great joy of Purim. But in order to get there, we have to be merciless to defeat Amalek, to defeat doubt. We press in in faith.

Lastly here, let's make the point that Yeshua is the ultimate example of hiddenness that reveals. He was born in humble circumstances and placed in a feeding trough. He spoke in parables. When possible, He avoided putting Himself forward. In the end, He allowed Himself to be stripped and beaten and hung on a cross, and the light that came from that humble and quiet life changed the world forever.

We'll end it there today. Thank you for listening. May God make us a people who are mighty to defeat Amalek in our lives. May He make us people whose actions reflect our priestly nature. May He make us into the people He wants us to be. Shalom.